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INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
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RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
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RUEAHND/CDRJTFB SOTO CANO HO
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RUEAHND/COMJTF-B SOTO CANO HO
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIAA/DIRJIAFF SOUTH
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHINGTON DC 0910
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHEHAAA/THE WHITE HOUSE WASHDC
RUMIAAA/USOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 000180

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV ENRG ECON ETRD CO HO

SUBJECT: COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT URIBE RECEIVED WITH HIGHEST HONORS TO INAUGURATE BIODIESEL PLANT

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (U) Summary: President of Colombia Alvaro Uribe's arrived in Honduras amongst great fanfare with his plane being escorted to the landing strip in San Pedro Sula by Honduras' squadron of F-5s. He was honored by the Mayor with the keys to the city and received the highest possible decorations by President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya and President of the Congress Roberto Micheletti. Uribe and Zelaya signed administrative accords on biofuels cooperation in front of an enthusiastic crowd from Honduras' conservative business community. The party traveled to Tocoa for a ribbon-cutting ceremony that inaugurated a biodiesel plant with a generator donated by the Colombian government at a cost of \$1 million. The plant will process 10,000 liters per day of biodiesel from palm oil, which is abundant in Honduras. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In an unprecedented show of pomp and circumstance, Uribe's plane was escorted to the landing strip in San Pedro Sula by Honduras' squadron of F-5s. He was honored by Rodolfo Padilla Sunseri, Mayor of San Pedro Sula, with the keys to the city and then taken to the posh businessmen's "Arab Club." At the club, President of the Congress Roberto Micheletti presented Uribe with the "Grand Cross Extraordinaire, Plaque of Gold." President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya then bestowed upon him the "Order of Francisco Morazan Grand Cross" -- the highest order a foreigner can receive in Honduras. Uribe and Zelaya signed an administrative accord on biofuels cooperation that complements and extends their 1980 technical agreement. The two presidents then proceeded to give speeches to a wildly enthusiastic crowd from the Honduran business community. The crowd interrupted both speakers on several occasions with rousing standing ovations. Zelaya highlighted Honduras, and Colombia's "special relationship" and noted that Honduras was the first country to recognize Colombia upon its independence.

¶3. (U) Following the speeches, the party traveled to Tocoa, near Trujillo, where they officially inaugurated a biodiesel plant that began operations in late 2008. The plant's generator was donated by the Government of Colombia at a cost of approximately \$1 million. The plant processes 10,000

liters per day of biodiesel from palm oil, which is abundant in Honduras.

¶4. (C) Comment: This trip by Uribe was a follow-on to Zelaya's trip to Colombia in October 2008. Zelaya has told the Ambassador that he felt Uribe went out of his way during that trip to make positive overtures and create a good relationship, including by bestowing high civilian honors on Zelaya. The visit underscores an attempt by Uribe to reach out diplomatically to countries in other parts of Latin America, like Honduras. Zelaya used the opportunity to burnish his conservative credentials with the business crowd and return the high honors to Uribe, who is popular with them. Zelaya also chose a topic that is relevant to the current economic crisis and which he knows the USG is interested in. In short, Zelaya seems to be trying to balance the scales following his recent trip to Cuba.

LLORENS